

**ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE**

[0085] The present invention provides polypeptides and specific binding agents that modify the activity of an initiator caspase involved in apoptosis, caspase-9. The polypeptides include the third baculoviral IAP repeat (BIR3) of an IAP and form a heterodimer complex with caspase-9. Nucleic acid molecules including expression vectors encoding the polypeptides and variants thereof as well as variants of caspase-9 are provided. Such polypeptide and nucleic acid molecules may be used for modifying apoptosis.